

**Names:** Archer Heinzen and Teddi Ahrens

**Funding amount:** \$20,000

**Name of Project:** ODYSSEY: Opening Doors for Salvadoran Youth (Avanza! Abriendo Puertas para la Juventud Salvadoreña)

**One-line Description:**

A program for 50 at-risk youth in Ilobasco, El Salvador to learn crafts, small business development and life skills.

**To be served:** 50 at-risk youth, 60% girls, 40% boys, ages 15 to 21, 60% from rural areas. Rural youth usually drop out of school because the distance and cost of transportation are too great. Both rural and urban youth may drop out due to the cost of books and lack of success in academic studies. Even for those who graduate from high school, few jobs are available. The situation is even worse for drop-outs who are at higher risk for gang involvement or immigration to the US.

**Need for the project:** Criminal youth gangs are ubiquitous in El Salvador with an estimation of at least 60,000 youth in gangs that menace the daily lives of most Salvadorans. El Salvador has the highest murder rate in Latin America and, with [Guatemala](#) and [Honduras](#), is considered an epicenter of the gang crisis. Corruption and weak government allow for rampant violence. The current government is struggling to change this, but faces daunting barriers. Although the government of El Salvador, with international support, is providing some youth training, it is not adequate to meet the need.

**Administering organization: MOJE (Asociacion Movimiento de Jovenes Encuentristas – Youth Outreach Movement)** is a non-profit training center that works with at-risk youth in Cabañas, an area where 55 percent of the population lives below the poverty level. The school is located in Ilobasco where MOJE is building on Ilobasco's role as a ceramics center and a tourist destination by training youth in the production of modern ceramics, screen printing, wood and metal crafts, as well as tourist services such as professional cooking, baking and restaurant management. Originally conceived as a skills training program, as an alternative to gang involvement, MOJE was founded in 1996 by Father Francisco Molina, but became a secular organization in 1998. MOJE is led by Salvador Hernandez who continues to work with at-risk youth and to make the center sustainable by developing crafts with international appeal.

**Description of the Project:** The proposed project, based on a model used by MOJE for over ten years, will train 50 at-risk youth in three areas:

**Technical skills:** Youth are introduced to a variety of skills and allowed to choose a preferred concentration. The skills proposed are jewelry making and crafts made from recycled materials, such as jewelry made from plastic bottles; bookmarks and cards made from recycled paper and dried flowers; wood products made with bottle caps and items made from used cloth. Examples of such products have been favorably received by craft outlets locally and internationally.

**Entrepreneurship:** The second step is to turn technical skills into income generation by learning entrepreneurial skills, such as business planning, bookkeeping, communication, and marketing. Students will form small business groups and apply for micro credit. In a country where every artisan store carries the same products, MOJE emphasizes creativity and the development of new, one-of-a-kind products. They maintain a store in Ilobasco where students can sell their products and help them market outside of the city. MOJE works with Austrian and Swiss Fair-trade organizations that market throughout Europe.

**Youth Development/Life Skills:** Through workshops, group counseling and meeting with health and social service professionals, students learn life skills, including family dynamics, reproductive health, and computer skills. An important part of this training includes understanding and preventing violence. Students are expected to become leaders and models in their communities so that their training will reach beyond their own self-improvement to building a culture of peace.

**Expected Results:****1. 50 youth will:**

\*be trained in jewelry-making or production of artisan products using recycled materials.

\*be trained in small business and life skills.

\*will prepare individual or group small business plans.

**2. 10 youth entrepreneurs set up small microenterprises.** To motivate youth to set up the microenterprises, awards of seed capital of \$200, \$300, and \$500 will be given for the three best business plans.

**3. Youth who do not set up small businesses will be referred for employment or further training/education.**

**4. Production of an informational package developed and distributed by MOJE that describes the process of artisan, microenterprise and life skills training and a follow-up plan to enable program replication.**

**Administration and Accountability:** The project will be managed by Salvador Hernandez in El Salvador.

[salvador@mojecasaartesanal.com](mailto:salvador@mojecasaartesanal.com) (Spanish only), with liaison and one or two oversight visits by Archer Heinzen.

Reporting during the first three months of the project will be monthly and afterwards quarterly.

**Timeline:** A first step is recruitment of participants and staff. The program is six months in length with 400 hours of instruction. Usually, classes begin in February, when the academic year begins in Central America, and ends before the national holiday during the first week in August.

**MOJE annual budget:** \$185,000.00

**Fit with MOJE's and Nova's missions:** MOJE's mission is to contribute to the prevention of juvenile violence through projects and programs supporting employment of at-risk and socially excluded youth.

Nova is committed to making Christ's reign of justice and peace a reality in the world, giving time, financial and spiritual support to feeding the poor, health care and education, here and abroad, the peace movement, environmental stewardship and more.

Both MOJE and Nova work for Christ by doing for "the least of these brothers and sisters". A number of Nova members have worked with the Co-partners project in El Salvador and are familiar with MOJE's work.

**Measurement of Success:** After their graduation, one-month, three-month, six-month and one-year follow-ups will be made with program participants and will result in one-half of the participants gainfully occupied in crafts production and sales, tourism, other employment or further studies/training after one year.

**Connection with the project administrator:** Don Salvador is someone I have known and consulted with for many years during Co-partners' work in Ilobasco. In 2008 when Co-partners needed space for a youth program, he lent us space at no cost and provided internships for several members of our program. Currently Don Salvador serves as a volunteer advisor to the women's group sponsored by Co-partners.

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>Funded by MOJE</b>	<b>Requested from the Marie Pinho Bequest</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Materials for Technical Training	\$1,000	\$3,000	\$4,000
Materials for Business Training	\$1,000	\$ 500	\$ 2,000
Equipment and Tools	\$2000*	\$2,000	\$ 6,000
Jewelry Teacher		\$1,000	\$ 1,000
2 Teachers of Crafts made from Recycled Materials		\$2,000	\$ 2,000
Facilitator for Life Skills		\$1,000	\$ 1,000
Facilitator for Business Development		\$1,000	\$ 1,000
Transportation stipends for rural students		\$3,500	\$ 2,000
Start-up funds awarded to three best proposals (seed capital)		\$1,000	
Vocational counselor		\$5,000	\$5,000
Project Administration	\$1,000		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>

\*Equipment that MOJE currently owns